

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** August 10, 2017

**Agenda Item:** Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area Forest Habitat Project #4

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 Min

◆-----◆

### **Background**

Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was purchased in 1976 for its values to wildlife and habitat. Because of its large intact acreage (almost 60,000 acres) that spans the continental divide, it provides both summer and winter range to several big game species including mule deer, elk, moose and antelope. Photo comparisons from the 1970's to today reveal a large amount of conifer expansion into sagebrush shrublands and grasslands on the WMA. Loss of these important habitat types are occurring throughout SW Montana, mainly due to fire suppression, climatic conditions, and other factors. If left unchecked, conifer expansion could impact the big game populations that depend on sagebrush and grasslands on the Mt. Haggin WMA for calving/fawning, summer weight gain, and winter survival, along with other wildlife species such as songbirds and small mammals.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

This project proposal has been discussed with the Big Hole Watershed Committee, Skyline Sportsmen and Anaconda Sportsmen. All groups expressed preliminary support for the project. Upon endorsement, a complete environmental assessment with a public comment period will be conducted.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

The total gross project area is 6,600 acres delineated into six treatment units. Within these units, a total of 1,523 acres are proposed for treatment, ranging in size from 65 to 646 acres. One unit is located west of the divide while the other five units are located east of the divide. This will mainly be a non-commercial harvest. Conifer to be removed includes primarily 30 to 40-year-old lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir. Treatment would include hand-removal methods, with slash being either lopped and scattered or piled and burned. Conifer would be removed from grasslands and sagebrush shrublands, aspen stands and willow-dominated riparian areas. Untreated areas would consist of mature forest stands and grass/shrublands, aspen and riparian areas not invaded by conifer expansion. No new roads would be created for this project.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

Mt. Haggin WMA plays a critical role in the annual life stages of many big game populations as well as numerous species of small mammals and songbirds. This proposal would ensure critical habitats remain functional and productive into the distant future.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve proceeding with further analysis and conducting an environmental assessment for the Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area Forest Habitat Project #4.